



ROCKED IT!

* THE VINES

MELKWEG, AMSTERDAM

WE ARE NOT ALONE. Holland is with the programme. The PA blasts out the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Queens Of The Stone Age and Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, and Melkweg is packed to its aluminium ramparts with eager new rock'n'rollers, trendy 'Dammers all psyched for the arrival of one of its most celebrated exponents. The sizzling atmosphere intensifies as the lights dim and the soundtrack switches to the hollering introduction to the MC5's 'Kick Out The Jams'. Are you ready brothers and sisters...? About as ready as any young band could hope for.

It's something of a party-dampener when Craig Nicholls, hair primped out at the back and wearing a Swervedriver sweat-shirt, slouches to his guitar and leads The Vines into a version of 'Highly Evolved' which seems to be happening at half speed. They're only two days back from a stint at home in their native Australia, where reports suggest they were far from showered the whole time with the lovin' adulation they've been enjoying in Blighty. Whether still wounded or whacked out on the local herb or just fried with jetlag – and they were on their tour bus pushing out major Zs not an hour before showtime – the foursome go at their debut hit with all the relish of a commuter trying to get his motor running on a wintery Monday morning. At the end, there isn't much clapping. Bummer.

Almost as if punishing the crowd for their lack of pogo action, Craig leads on into a bunch of the *Highly Evolved* album's mellow and most beautiful songs ('Autumn Shade', 'Country Yard', 'Drown The Baaptists'), and delivers his vocals in a variety of shrieks, moans and atonal bellowing which bare almost no relation to the original tune. "Fuck you people!" he screams at them. As melodrama, seeing a man savage his own songs to piss off an audience, it's oddly compelling. As music, it's absolutely dreadful, a betrayal of some of the finest songs of this year.

This is CraigWorld. He plainly, and laudably, despises the idea of being on stage and replicating his records note-perfect – but at what cost? Casting off his guitar for their cover of Outkast's 'Miss Jackson' (barely a ripple of recognition from the crowd – it's getting frosty), he starts experimenting with his mic stand, bending it through awkward angles, and finally settles at a place which involves him balancing on the monitor, doubled over, howling the words unlistenable. If this is some effort to spark a kind of magic, it fails. It's the worst performance by any band of any song that this writer has ever witnessed.

Photography: Sandra Waibl



His band-mates by now looking rather sheepishly at the ground, Nicholls even manages to look bored during a new number called 'Evil Town', another short slab of throat-shredding anguish. Things can only get better and, suddenly, mercifully, dramatically, they do. 'Get Free' elicits a minor moshpit. There are more slowies – 'Mary Jane', 'Homesick', 'Sun Child'. Craig sings them properly and there's a whole new energy in the room. Several times he swats his mic stand down with his guitar, and his roadies visibly shrink back from replacing it. Finally, Craig is in flight.

'In The Jungle' ends in an unbelievable blur of activity. Nicholls swipes his guitar at the drumkit several times while sticksman Hamish Rosser manfully tries to hold the beat together. Nichols tosses his axe in the air and doesn't wait to see it land, instead grabbing a mic stand and lancing it through the air space that Rosser vacated a fraction of a second before. Big applause.

They run back for a '1969' and another breakneck newbie, lovingly entitled 'Fuck The World'. They can be little more than halfway through when Craig aborts the mission, thrashing his guitar around wildly, hacking at the drumkit, and finally hurling whole chunks from it around the stage. Again, the roadies run for cover. You can see the whites of their eyes. An hour later, The Vines are tucked up in bed on their tour bus. Not your average night of rock'n'roll...

Andrew Perry